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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000752

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: CEM UZAN STUMPS YOUTH IN ISTANBUL

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Genc Party leader Cem Uzan's recent speech to a gathering of university student leaders in Istanbul provided insight into both his political skills and shortcomings as he seeks to build on his surprisingly strong showing in last year's election. While charismatic in some ways, Uzan failed significantly to address key student concerns about employment and education reform in the Q and A session. Uzan also seems to have changed targets of criticism, saying nothing about the United States and taking only a brief swipe at the IMF. Instead, Uzan railed at length against the European Customs Union (though not the EU, interestingly). If Uzan is to burnish his up-and-coming image and appear to voters as a serious candidate, he will have to understand the feelings of Turkish voters on more issues than just the pain of international integration. END SUMMARY.

Heeeeeere's Cemmy!

12. (U) A youthful politician bounds onto stage. The applause of the 1,400-person crowd rise to a near roar as he takes off his blazer, and puts on the youth conference's t-shirt. Live Star TV (owned by Uzan) cameras zoom in on the podium, while a boom camera pans through the crowd. As a media opportunity, Cem Uzan's recent speech at a "GencNet" conference at Istanbul's Yeditepe University began very well.

13. (U) GencNet, a web site devoted to civic action by youth, is supported by both the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the ARI Movement, a local NGO which works to develop civil society in Turkey. GencNet's basic message to Turkish youth is "get involved," and this year's conference allowed youth to vote on who they wanted for the keynote speaker. Answer: Cem Uzan, leader of Genc (Youth) Party.

Proud Entry for Turkey

14. (U) Uzan's speech touched on all the major "hot topics" of Turkish politics: war in Iraq, economic crisis, relations with the EU and the US, and the Cyprus question. Interestingly, though Uzan made passing reference to his dislike for Turkey's "subservience" to IMF demands, he refrained from further comment. Instead, he blamed a host of Turkish economic woes (including joblessness, and drops in agricultural and industrial exports) on the European Customs Union, of which Turkey is a member.

15. (U) Stating he believed Turkey to have lost USD 70 billion in customs revenues in the last seven years as a result of the customs union membership, Uzan said that the EU was charging Turkey "the price for EU membership" without providing "the product" (i.e. full membership). In a further political contortion, Uzan claimed to be pro-EU, but said that Turkey must enter the European Union "proudly, not begging to be accepted." However, he said he believed that in the future, the EU would be a superpower, and if Turkey were to join, it would be "part of that superpower."

16. (U) Twice in the course of the Q and A session, Uzan visibly failed to address the questions posed to him (questions for Uzan were submitted to the GencNet web site and did not seem to have been given in advance to Uzan). In both cases, the concerns were specific to Turkish university students, and resulted effectively in meandering non-answers from Uzan. In response to a roundly-applauded question on what he would do as a future Prime Minister to encourage post-university job prospects, especially in light of his pledge to quadruple the number of Turkish universities, and (as the questioner pointed out) the difficulty graduates already face in the job market, Uzan blamed customs union membership as the cause of lost jobs. He added that his

focus is on raising the number of universities; the question of employment is unrelated. His answer was not applauded.

I said "no," but AK should have said "yes"

17. (U) When asked about his position on the war in Iraq, Uzan made reference to several full-page adds he took out in his family's newspapers and elsewhere. "As you all know, I was against this war in Iraq, remembering the losses Turkey suffered in the first Gulf War. However, the AK government was inexperienced, and started bargaining, rather than looking after Turkey's strategic interests. If the motion (to allow the US bases and transit through Turkey) had been approved, Turkey would have gotten a seat at the table to decide the future of Iraq. The problem is not US-Turkish relations, but Turkey's bargaining approach to the issue."

Comment

18. (SBU) Uzan benefited from slick public relations advice, lumpenproletariat glee at his ability to swindle Motorola out of USD 2 billion, and his widespread ownership of television and press outlets in the Fall 2002 general election campaign, and again in his early-2003 anti-US/anti-war media campaign. However, his performance at the GencNet Conference suggests a lack of knowledge on a variety of significant issues, including higher education, employment, national security, and Cyprus. Additionally, Uzan's schizophrenic positions on the EU and war in Iraq serve to muddle his message. The run-up to November's election was a sprint for Uzan. Any future aspirations for parliament will be more of a political "marathon," and require a broader and more persuasive message than he has heretofore displayed. We will continue to press Genc Party contacts as well on Uzan's defrauding of Motorola.
END COMMENT.

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